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- **RANCHO DIABLO**

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- **by Court Tefft**

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>> *Everything has changed now except our way of thinking*

Einstein

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>> *The human animal...must change now, or he faces absolute and complete destruction and maybe the insect age and an atmosphere less planet.*

- *Harry Truman*

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>> *If you've seen one redwood you've seen them all.*

Ronald Reagan

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>> Garage in the Redwoods

The garage has become mythical in Silicon Valley lore and in America, as a symbol for entrepreneurial wherewithal. The garage is a place where dreams can come true and become a reality with transformative ramifications felt around the world.

How many internationally known businesses got going in a garage locally? Quite a few, Google in Mt. View, HP in Palo Alto, Apple in Cupertino. One often overlooked garage success story is the Whole Earth Network of ideas and businesses that germinated in Menlo Park and sprouted in a garage in Woodside (Skylonda).

I lived in that garage with Heather Hairston in the late 1970's on a commune known as Ranch Diablo, where the Whole Earth Catalog, Supplements and the Domebooks were produced by Stewart Brand and staff. To this day the Whole Earth Network continues to flower and spread its seeds across this planet.

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- (Heather sunbathing in the garden behind the garage.)
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>> According to Stewart in the last Whole Earth Catalog:

"In Sept. 1968 Lois and I moved into Ortega Park (formerly Ranch Diablo), 70 acres and a house newly leased by Portola Institute as a teachers laboratory. She was housekeeper and I was caretaker in an empty mansion. It was a plush time."

- Portola Institute was a non profit educational foundation based in Menlo Park and headed by Dick Raymond. The foundation helped develop Ortega Park Teachers Laboratory, The Farallones Institute, Briarpatch Society (food co-ops), as well as the Whole Earth Catalog. Early on The Institute was into integrating computers into schools. According to Theodore Rozak, Portola put it's efforts into scaling down, democratizing and humanizing "our hypertrophic technological society."

>> Brand went to work for the Institute where the catalog got its start:**

"In Oct. 1968 we started production on the first Whole Earth Catalog in the garage at Ortega. Sandy fell in love with the IBM composer while Joe nailed together light tables out of scrap plywood. We got some electric heaters and started work. Joe did layout, Sandy typed, I researched, reviewed, edited, and photographed."

"In July 1968 I printed up a mimeographed 6 page "partial preliminary booklist" of what I'd gathered so far (Tantra, Art, Cybernetics, The Indian Tip, Recreational Equipment, about 120 items, with samples of each in the back of our truck Lois and I set out to visit the market – familiar communes in New Mexico and Colorado" (Lois is Stewart's wife)

>> Later Brand would say:**

"To the extent that the Whole Earth Catalog reflected a particular "theory of civilization" it was a theory developed on the communes." The catalog and its supplements did not deal with the hot button political issues of the day, war, economics, civil rights, etc. Instead they focused on the do it yourself individualism, rural self sufficiency, idealism and tribalism of the communal movement. The underlying current of the movement was always to create a better self and world via experimentation. The Catalogs helped unify broaden and validate that which was already happening.

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>> Stewart states, "I only dimly recall what we did with the first Catalog. We sent them to the 50 or so subscribers we'd got with mailers and personal contact. We carted some around to stores who didn't want them, not even on consignment. (Too big, Too expensive, What is it?)"

The Whole Earth Catalog was not the only enterprise to be assembled and printed at Rancho Diablo. Domebooks I and II (a Pacific High School project) as well as the quarterly supplements, with their particular focus on communal life in America, came out of the garage at Rancho.

>> According to Fred Turner in From Counterculture to Cyberculture (2006):**

"In time the Catalog would become the single most visible publication in which the technological and intellectual output of industry and high science met the Eastern religion, acid mysticism, and communal social theory of the-back-to-the-land movement.

It also became the emblem of a new, geographically distributed community."

By 1970 the success of The Whole Earth Truck Store retail operation on Santa Cruz Ave. in Menlo Park, combined with the success of the publishing business began to take its toll on Stewart. He had a high anxiety breakdown where simple tasks became complex and a decision was made to bring the Catalog to an end by 1971.

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>> At about the same time (1970), according to Stewart, "When the teachers lab at Ortega (Rancho) finally failed and quit, JD and I pressed to get it as a home for most of the Truck Store Staff, a commune. Idealism filled the air. It was never a very successful commune; it was a plenty educational one."

Rancho had several incarnations and metamorphosis as a community between 1968 and 1980. One offshoot of Ranch Diablo was [The Land](#) Community on Page Mill Rd. Some of the earliest and original "backlanders" migrated to "The Land" after being evicted from Rancho when the property changed hands. Years later when the residents of the close to 800 acres Land community were evicted, some of them would move back to Rancho, only to be evicted again a couple of years later when the property again changed hands. For me Rancho was the best piece of property around... it had it all. From magical ancient redwood forests to rolling open grass hills with live oaks, sweeping views of the ocean and easy access to the corner store and flats. The main house was a mansion. One time servant's quarters ample bathrooms and bedrooms provided privacy and allowed for community. We also had electricity a big step up after living in the backwoods for a few years.

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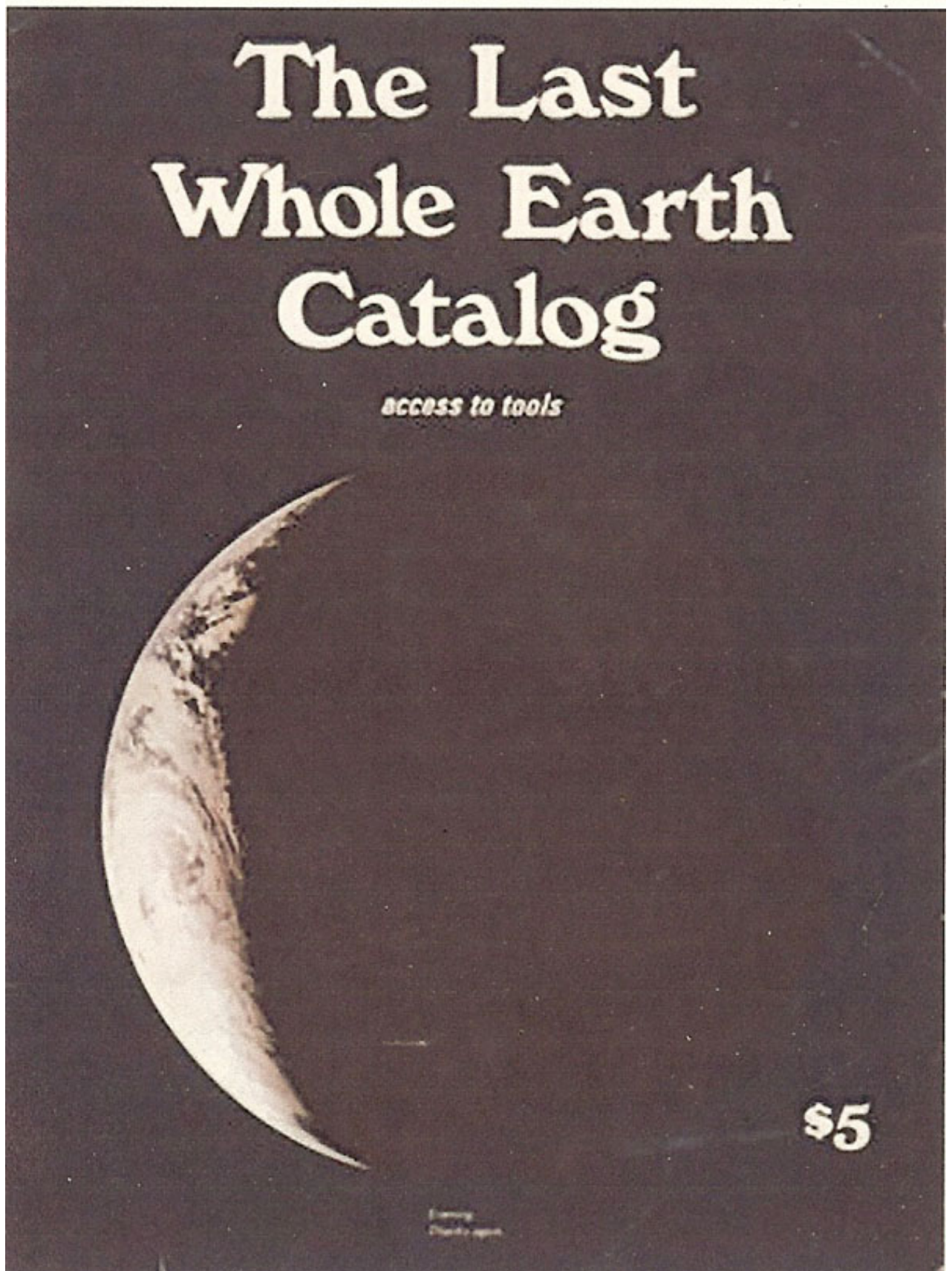
- o The communal scene in the hills was strong for 10 plus years dating back to The Merry Pranksters, and Ken Kesey in the mid 1960's down the road in La Honda. Steward Brand was also a Merry Prankster though he didn't go on the infamous bus ride to the east coast to hook up with Timothy Leary. According to Tom Wolfe, Brand represented "the restrained reflective wing of the Merry Pranksters."

Like many before and after them Kesey and Brand became somewhat disillusioned with the communal scene, which can be a very difficult journey. In The Last Whole Earth Catalog Stewart on a positive note, had this to say under the heading of The Commune lie: "One reason we promote communes is that there's no better place to make all the wishful mistakes, to get your nose rubbed in your fondest fantasies. (Sometimes a mistake works, that's gravy, and an obligation. The Catalog was a mistake that worked.) "

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- **Transformation:**

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> >> Kesey and Brand had both been psychedelized as guinea pigs for establishment research projects into the mind altering effects of the legal drug LSD. Steward, a Stanford graduate, had

participated in an LSD project at Stanford. He soon gravitated toward the bohemian Perry Lane scene of The Grateful Dead and Kesey.

>> According to Rolling Stones 40th anniversary addition, May 3rd 2007, Stewart took his last trip in 1969. After reading his interview it might be time for him to once again expand his perspective on the nature of reality. While still focusing on the future Brand seems impatient, dismissive and disillusioned with the past. By leaps and bounds Stewart stands out as the harshest and most bitter of the 60's survivors and luminaries interviewed. Stewart remembers the past as a Blizzard of Youthful Folly: besides the emergence of the computer age and some good music, for him the 60's were rater disappointing.

> >> According to Stewart:

>> "The counterculture excelled at trying a whole lot of stuff in a short period of time. Almost everything we tried either failed hideously or didn't pan out. Communes failed, drugs went nowhere, free love led pretty directly to AIDS. A lot of people thought Mao Tse-Tung was a hero. Domes leaked. Graphic art was dreadful, except for Andy Warhol and Robert Crumb, the underground cartoonist. The rest was basically tie-dyed. The Music was good."

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>> Personally I disagree but would like to say Thank you Stewart for expanding the boundaries of our personal, national, scientific, entrepreneurial, sociological, and global realities.

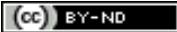
> >> All Things Must Pass**

>> By the mid 80's the communal scene in the Skyline area had pretty much petered out. Land was in short supply and very expensive.

>> I used to jokingly say that every other car in the 70's was a VW or old pickup truck which was great for all the hitchhikers, but by the mid 80's every other car was a BMW or Mercedes. There were no hitchhikers.

>> Today the area is populated primarily by the High Tec elite and other supporting actors in the Silicon Valley success story.

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